PROOF HOUSE

THE SAMUEL COLT TEXAS PATERSON

By Phil Spangenberger

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Above: Based on an original Paterson, serial number 755, this replica, complete with authentic accessories, is the finest copy that's ever been attempted.

This revolver is attractively housed in a French-fitted, velvet-lined cherry wood display case.

In the business of gunwriting, I see quite a few "commemorative" or "special-issue" firearms. Some of them are nice, others are a cut above. Once in a while, a gun comes along that is a bit beyond what one would expect of a modern-made commemorative. This is definitely the case with the United States Historical Society's (USHS) Samuel Colt Texas Paterson pistol. Of all the special-issue arms I've looked at in the past couple of decades, this is probably the best looking and most distinctive firearm issued as a commemorative that I've laid eyes on. This quality USHS replica, and its period accessory-filled case, was specially created for them by Old World replica manufacturer A. Uberti & Co. of Gardonne, Italy, which, under the leadership of Aldo Uberti, has probably duplicated more famous 19th-century firearms than any other firm.

Although just recently introduced, this project has been in the works for around three years, as I recall seeing a prototype of this Paterson at the Shooting, Hunting & Outdoor Trade Show (SHOT Show) in 1986 and was quite excited about it at that time. Noted Colt authority R. L. Wilson and USHS chief gunsmith Jeff Belcher worked closely with Uberti to see that this unique revolver would be the finest of its type ever reproduced. Based on the sample sent to us for review, I'd say they succeeded. In fact, the entire *Guns & Ammo* staff, who normally take a blasé attitude toward black powder-type commemoratives, was quite impressed with this Texas Paterson.

Based on an original .36 caliber belt model, or "Texas" Paterson, serial number 755, which was produced around 1838-1840 by Col. Samuel Colt's Patent Arms Manufacturing Co. of Paterson, New Jersey, the five-shot revolver is the

COLOR PHOTOGRAPHY BY STEPHEN LEE

closest copy of this historic early Colt that's ever been attempted. Almost every detail of the original Texas Paterson, including the seldom-encountered three-piece loading lever assembly, has been incorporated into this classy reproduction. The 12½-inch-long, 2-pound, 12-ounce revolver is finished in dark blue, with color case-hardened loading lever, hammer, backstrap, and frame floorplate. The rich floral engraving pattern has been copied in minute detail; as well, the sextet of German silver-inlaid bands found on the original have been worked into this copy—except that the USHS replica's bands are of solid silver!

One of the things that impresses me the most about the gun itself is that genuine mother-of-pearl stocks are used rather than a less-expensive imitation, adding to the high-quality look of this historic reproduction. Actually, about the only negative point this ol' purist can find with the USHS Texas Paterson is that apparently in an effort to thwart counterfeiting in the future, it appears that an 1851 Navy Colt-type square-cornered barrel wedge has been used rather than the Paterson's rounded-bottom style. However, this certainly does not spoil the overall effect of this vintage-type handgun. It certainly gives the impression of what an 1830's Paterson Colt may have looked like when it was new.

Unlike most commemoratives, this Colt clone maintains an authentic flavor by not being covered with unnecessary and non-period embellishments. About the only markings you'll find on the exterior of this "five-shooter" are the roll-engraved "Samuel Colt Texas Paterson" along the top of its 7½-inch octagon barrel and the serial numbers stamped underneath the frame and the barrel assembly. Because this gun is a functional firearm capable of being shot, the required safety markings of "BLACK POWDER ONLY," along with the necessary Italian proofmarks and maker's logo, have been stamped discreetly out of the way, hidden underneath the loading lever along the bottom of the barrel. Beyond these, the only decorations found on this handsome replica are the above-mentioned hand-engraved floral decorations and the traditional roll-engraved cylinder scene depicting a stagecoach holdup.

The USHS Paterson replica comes in a handsome cherry wood double-tiered display case. The top portion of this beautifully finished, French-fitted, brown velvet-lined box displays the revolver and its accessories, which include quality reproductions of a Paterson-type three-handled bullet mould, screwdriver, and brass cleaning rod, all of which have been copied from the original case of Paterson Colt no. 755, right down to the fancy turned walnut grips of each tool. Complementing these tools are reproductions of no. 755's brass powder measure/charger and the silvered capper, which is embellished with the early Patent Arms Manufacturing Co. logo of Sam Colt's 1830's-era rampant Colt motif, along with two crossed Paterson belt model revolvers. A fancy brass key to the case is included in this outfit, and the entire display portion of the case is highlighted with a stylized printed sheet, inset into the inside of the case lid, of the USHS' Paterson loading and cleaning instructions—complete with period artwork to maintain the flavor of this old Colt.

Beneath the gun and accessories compartment is a drawer where a copy of a special edition of the excellent volume *Paterson Colt Pistol Variations,* autographed by authors Philip R. Phillips and R.L. Wilson, is contained. Complete with detailed photos (many in color) and period illustrations, this scholarly work offers the most complete and authoritative study of these arms ever published. To add to the value of this set, both the book and the revolver in each cased outfit will bear the registry number within the limited edition of 1,000.

Obviously, an outfit like this won't be found in discount stores or on the markdown table. This is a quality example of fine firearms artistry that pays tribute to a revolutionary revolver—one of the first production Colts and the model that started the Colt legend. If you were to commission a gunmaker to specially create such a piece, complete with hand engraving, silver inlays, genuine mother-of-pearl stocks, cherry wood case, and all accessories, the cost would be far greater than the $2,500 price tag of the U.S. Historical Society's Paterson Colt replica. This outfit is a first-class effort in every way. With original Paterson Colts commanding prices greater than the average 3-bedroom home, this quality reproduction affords the arms collector an opportunity to own not only a fine working example of this rare revolver, but a piece of firearms art as well. It represents the type of firearm that one can proudly display without having to make any apologies because it is a replica. A fine gun such as this can even be appreciated by those who would not normally give most guns a second look, or who perhaps have a disdain for firearms in general. It is art.

As you can tell, I am quite impressed with the United States Historical Society's Samuel Colt Texas Paterson. It is the type of replica that truly honors the arm that it commemorates, while at the same time contributes to the knowledge of firearms history by making such a rare gun available to arms buffs other than the very rich. If you have an interest in early Colts, or guns in general, you'll appreciate this percussion replica. It is top of the line!

A unique feature of the 1830's Colt Paterson five-shot revolver design is that the trigger does not drop into position until the hammer is cocked.

SPECIFICATIONS

SAMUEL COLT TEXAS PATERSON

Maker:	United States Historical Society Dept. GA First and Main Streets Richmond, VA 23219
Caliber:	.36
Action:	5-shot percussion revolver
O/A Length:	12½ inches
Barrel Length:	7½-inch octagonal
Weight:	2 pounds, 12 ounces
Stocks:	Genuine mother-of-pearl
Finish:	Blued and color case-hardened, hand engraved
Price:	$2,500—set limited to 1,000 guns. Includes cherry wood two-tiered case with period accessories, special edition autographed hardbound book.